

say about paintings of shimmering light with
no people in them, and how many times can
you get away with saying it?"

and she says, "i think that's precisely what
i'd like you to write: poems with no
people in them."

THE SPLURGE

it is my birthday. i turn
fifty-three. i decide to
treat myself to whatever
lunch i truly desire, the
cost be damned.

my taste buds do not
lead me to the pine avenue
fish house or spago's or
ma maison, but to

poncho's, on pacific coast
highway, for a chorizo tostada
and a chicken enchilada, a la
carte, and a ten-ounce bottle
of coca-cola poured over ice.
it's been a while since i have
eaten at poncho's, although
i have innumerable times done
so over the past thirty years.

tip included, the tab comes to
less than ten dollars. in my
opinion mexican food is getting
a bit pricey, but, on this day,
there is no lunch i could have
enjoyed more.

INVERTED PYRAMID

a long time ago a student of
mine, mike ward, advised me:
"never deny it when anyone
accuses you of getting laid,
whether or not it's true. everybody
wants a winner."

it was a demotic variant
of "nothing succeeds like success"
or even of oscar wilde's "nothing
succeeds like excess."

and if i had been as good-looking,
experienced, charming, articulate,
rich, and, most of all, as confident
as mike, it might have worked for me.

MANIFESTOS

the alzheimer's association sends me
a packet of notecards bearing
reproductions from monet. i like
them: they are not the most common
prints, but ones like "tulip field
in holland" and "customs officer's
cottage." i don't send back the
hoped-for donation, because i am
saving for my own senility, and i
don't correspond with my friends on
them, because my friends are also
getting a bit long in the tooth
themselves and might take it the
wrong way. instead i just use them
as bookmarks in my current reading:
a motley selection of bukowski,
elmer kelton, a.s. byatt, pat
barker, colin dexter.

the reproductions are unusually crisp:
they look a lot like photographs.

is this what monet was trying
to accomplish?

i thought it was what he was trying
to avoid.

the main thing is that whatever he
thought he was trying to
prove or eschew
his aesthetic goals got him to
put paint on canvas.

SHE COULD PROBABLY HAVE FLIPPED THROUGH MY CASE OF
THE MISSING BLUE VOLKSWAGEN WHILE SNEEZING

i read in evelyn wood's obituary
that the founder of speedreading
could absorb fifteen thousand words per minute.

i figure that a good novella runs
somewhere between twenty and forty thousand